



Aruba celebrates UNESCO “Dia di Teatro” with a tribute to the past, present and future of the arts in Aruba

The International Theatre Institute (ITI), a non-governmental organization (NGO), which was founded in Prague in 1948 by UNESCO, designated March 27 as “World Theatre Day” in 1961. A worldwide network, ITI aims “to promote international exchange of knowledge and practice in theatre arts (drama, dance, music theatre) in order to consolidate peace and solidarity between peoples, to deepen mutual understanding and increase creative co-operation between all people in the theatre arts.” Mr. James Oduer is the Secretary General of UNESCO in Aruba.

This year, Aruba, which is home to a thriving community of performers, directors and playwrights, observed the occasion on Tuesday evening in the Cas di Cultura in Oranjestad. The evening of remarkable performances paid tribute to all the classic arts, aside from also highlighting the visual arts and modern technology as a means of entertainment as art.

Most of those performing that evening were the island’s young people, studying theatrical arts at the IPA, the Instituto Pedagogico Arubano, the island’s school for teacher candidates. Attendees were greeted by noted musician Jair Britten performing on the Klong drum from Thailand. Jair has just returned to his homeland after spending years touring with some top bands in Europe.

A number of the presentations of the evening held strong messages for today’s youth and society. They were part of the Artistiek Creatief Project (ACP) for the IPA students. The first skit was the literary and directorial work of Thakai Mohamed, performed by a young group of poets and actors called Hobenan Apoyando Literatura y Arte (HALA.) Titled “The Party,” it demonstrated the consequences of irresponsible behavior regarding drinking and sex, with a strong moral lecture for all age groups, but in particular, naïve teenagers.

Following was a multimedia presentation titled “Nos Caranan” (Our Faces) by Jhon Fredy Montoya and Suhaila Alders consisting of the art work of Walter Wever. Walter, a young portraitist, has immortalized many of Aruba’s historic and pop culture luminaries in charcoal.

A celebration of the art of dance punctuated by multimedia extolled the joys and sorrows of life, from birth to death. The duo of Jhon Fredy Montoya and Fatme Rigaud were haunting in their movements that communicated love, joy, loneliness, and grief, and the many emotions that take us through life.

Master of Ceremonies Yubi Naar then introduced two visitors from Curacao, Ms. Angela Roe, mentor to the poetry group “La Tentashon” and also Director of the Teatro Luna Blau di Corsou” (The Curacao Blue Moon Theater.) She in turn praised the work being done by young people today in the theatre for not only their enthusiasm, but their attempts to extend beyond conventional drama into new directions. Visiting Aruba with her was young Cheldrick Bishop, Grand Prize winner of the national poetry competitions of 2004 called “The Art of Words.” He performed two of his works on stage, including his award-winning piece “Shon Skurdar.” Both were wry comments on the deterioration of moral values and the embracing of a material society with its accompanying corruption. Not only did he perform with emotion and show a fine flair for acting, but he also revealed a sharp and insightful understanding of hypocrisy and the attitudes that precursor the fall of a society.

Rosalbelle Illis, who could be considered Aruba’s counterpart to Cheldrick, is a young poetess of remarkable intellect and insight, and she presented two original works, in English and Papiamentu with the assistance of the members of HALA. Her subject matter was a castigation of politicians that criticize and attempt to suppress creative freedom and commentary that does not support them. The Director of the Instituto di Cultura, Frank Croes echoed these sentiments in his address to the audience, emphasizing that the freedom to create artistically is paramount to a free world, and that censorship, particularly political censorship, is intolerable.

Just before the grand finale of the evening, the organizers took the time to recognize individuals and groups that have made enormous contributions to the growth and promulgation of the arts in Aruba. These included The Clown Doctors, teachers, and students of the IPA drama department, Fund Arte, Leonardo Tromp, and Amy Lasten, the last of which have been very active in theater and bringing fine performing art to Aruba. Amy Lasten was named winner of the Aruba National Theater Award for 2007 for her life-long devotion to the stage.

The final presentation for the night was also part of the IPA creative project, written and directed by IPA student Joan Danies and titled “Abuso di Poder” (Abuse of Power.) It was a forceful indictment of petty bureaucracy, hypocrisy and the misuse of political influence. It was a fitting end to evening that was

not only a celebration of the arts, but a statement about creative freedom, and the need for the next generation to guard their right to experience it, and also to protect their future in the performing arts.